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SUBJECT: Senegal: National Assembly elects new Speaker

REF: Dakar 1325

¶1. (SBU) Summary and Introduction: On November 16, Senegal's National Assembly elected a new Speaker, Mamadou Seck, the former Chair of the Assembly's Finance Committee. His election ends the long saga between President Abdoulaye Wade and the former Chair of the Assembly, Macky Sall, who was ousted after he refused to resign upon Wade's request. Meanwhile, Sall has created his own political party. End summary.

Who is the new Speaker of the Assembly?

¶2. (SBU) Mamadou Seck was until 1996 a member of the Directorate of the Party of Independence and Labor (PIT) a former communist party. He left PIT when President Wade, while in the opposition, asked him to join his party and run for office as mayor of the small town of MBao, in the suburbs of Dakar. He graduated in banking and economics in France. After Wade's election, he became Minister of Transportation and Equipment in 2001 and subsequently Minister of Infrastructure, from 2002 to 2006. Seck also served briefly in 2001 as Minister of Economy and Finance but resigned from this position following allegations that he had embezzled funds in the 80s when he was Managing Director of SOMICOA, a shipping company. A court ruling subsequently dismissed all charges.

An opportunistic choice

¶3. (SBU) As Chair of the Assembly's Finance Committee, Seck was the person who initiated the attempt to have a hearing on how the President's son, Karim, was spending public money on infrastructure projects in the run up to March 2008 Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit as head of the presidential OIC preparation agency known as ANOCI. This attempt infuriated Wade and led directly to the downfall of Sall. However, in Seck's case, a senior National Assembly member told Embassy that Seck apologized to the President and was forgiven. His nomination serves several purposes. Ostensibly, Wade hopes to show his magnanimity by underlining that he is not after those who demanded accountability from his son. Seck is also the most capable political leader in the Dakar region. Apparently, Wade is focusing his attention on the suburbs of the capital because he is concerned that it may become a source of unrest after severe flooding this summer left thousands of people, who were already living in precarious conditions, homeless. Seck will seek to recapture this area where Wade's popularity is weakening. His election will also satisfy the Tijdanes, the largest brotherhood in Senegal, as he is closely related to their Caliph. So far all leaders that have headed political institutions were Mourides, Wade's own brotherhood.

COMMENT

¶4. (SBU) Seck was elected by a large majority, 133 for and 3 against. Even members of the opposition voted for him as he is recognized as being competent with strong leadership qualities. However, the Constitutional changes that led to his election have reduced the President of the National Assembly from an independent

head of a co-equal branch of government to a subordinate of the president. It just takes a resolution signed by thirty eight members (out of one hundred fifty) to initiate a process to remove the National Assembly president from office. This tool will allow the Wade to deter any attempt by a National Assembly president to act independently of the will of the president further eroding the country's system of separation of powers.
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